

Wilson Urges House Leadership to Protect Women's Health

WASHINGTON, DC – Today Congressman Charlie Wilson (OH-6) urged House Leadership to protect women's access to mammography services. This week's report from the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force has sparked a great deal of controversy about whether or not women under 50 should have an annual mammography to screen for breast cancer. In response, the American Cancer Society has announced that it will continue to recommend that women receive annual mammograms starting at age 40. Congressman Wilson led a group of 18 colleagues in asking that the final version of the health care bill include provisions to ensure no woman 40 and older loses access to their mammography coverage.

"My sister Becky was diagnosed with breast cancer at the age of 46," Wilson said. "Thanks to early detection by a mammogram, Becky was able to beat breast cancer. I want to make sure every woman continues to receive this life-saving preventative care, and I want to make sure that care is covered by insurance policies."

The text of the letter sent today to Speaker Nancy Pelosi, Majority Leader Steny Hoyer, and Committee Chairmen Charles Rangel, Henry Waxman, and George Miller follows:

November 20, 2009

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
The United States Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Steny H. Hoyer
House Majority Leader
The United States Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Charles Rangel
Chairman
Ways and Means Committee
2354 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Henry Waxman
Chairman
Energy and Commerce Committee
2204 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable George Miller
Chairman
Education and Labor Committee
2205 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Colleagues:

We are writing to express our concerns about the potential impact the recent breast cancer screening recommendations made by the United States Preventive Services Task Force could have on women's access to mammography services. Therefore, as Congress works to fix our broken health care system, we ask that any health reform bill considered in the future by the House of Representatives include provisions to ensure no woman 40 and older loses access to their mammography coverage.

It is estimated that one in eight women will develop breast cancer in their lifetime, and nearly everyone has had a relative or friend affected by this potentially deadly diagnosis. In the interest of early detection and intervention, many women in their 40s have heeded the advice of professionals who have recommended annual mammograms for women age 40 and over. Having insurance providers cover mammograms has ensured that financial concerns are not a factor in a woman's decision whether or not to be screened, helping to make sure this decision is made between a woman and her medical provider.

However, on November 16, 2009, the United States Preventive Services Task Force released new recommendations against routine mammography screening for breast cancer in women ages 40 to 49. While we recognize the mission of the Task Force and respect their efforts to bring an impartial assessment of the scientific evidence available for preventive services, we are concerned about the impact these recommendations could have on insurance coverage of the mammography services women ages 40-49 have relied on for years. Given that the Task Force is just one of many groups involved in evaluating scientific research, we believe that additional research should be conducted as to the benefits and risks of routine mammography screening before any woman's health insurance coverage for mammogram services is discontinued.

H.R. 3962 makes significant improvements to the health care system by reducing costs, eliminating pre-existing conditions exclusions and prohibiting insurance companies from

cutting off coverage for those who become ill. Women with breast cancer will benefit from these protections currently included in H.R. 3962. However, we respectfully ask that any health reform legislation voted on in the future by the House of Representatives include provisions to protect women's access to mammography services and prevent insurers from rolling back important coverage until additional research can be conducted.

Thank you for your attention to this important and timely matter. Please do not hesitate to contact any of the signed Members.